ABSTRACT. My primary goal in this paper is to focus attention on a certain conception of internal access, on the Cartesian conception that a rational subject's capacity to determine sameness and difference in explicit propositional attitudes is independent of knowledge of the external world. This conception of introspection plays a crucial, if unacknowledged, role in numerous arguments and theoretical positions. In particular, it plays a large role in motivating psychological internalism. I argue in favor of rejecting this epistemology and the internalism it supports.

A fundamental element in the Cartesian conception of mind – one which figured crucially in the development of Cartesian skepticism – is the supposition that psychological states are internal states, i.e., that they are logically independent of the external world. Descartes's general conception of mind has long been out of favor with philosophers of mind and psychology, but his internalism has not been the target of major criticism until relatively recently. In recent years internalist intuitions have been recast in a decidedly non-Cartesian fashion, in a way that reflects the physicalistic bent of the times; they have been refashioned as supervenience claims, claims to the effect that subjects can differ in psychological states, such as belief, only if they differ in their internal physical states, e.g., differ in their physiological makeup (so no mere difference in environment can make for a difference in psychological state). In one form or another, and for a variety of methodological and metaphysical reasons, psychophysical supervenience has proven virtually irresistible to many. Attractive or not, this contemporary internalism now faces a serious challenge, a challenge, which, if successful, tells not only against psychophysical supervenience, but also against many versions of the more venerable and very different Cartesian internalism.

Familiar arguments of Kripke and Putnam seem to show beyond serious doubt that linguistic reference and content do not satisfy corresponding internalist constraints. The linguistic reference of proper names and natural kind terms (and, hence, the content of the sentences in which they figure) is determined by a variety of contextual factors. Twin-earth examples serve to dramatically highlight these intuitions. Twin-earth we suppose to be like earth but for the fact that twin-earthians use the term 'water' to designate something other than H2O.

(though it has all the surface characteristics of water). An earthling and his twin thus express different propositions by their respective tokenings of 'water is clear', even though the twins are particle for particle replicas. Burge, McGinn, Stich, and others, were quick to draw the further inference: such twins differ not only in what they say, but in the beliefs they express using their respective languages. The contextual differences which legitimize attributing different assertions to them also legitimize attributing different beliefs to them; these physically-identical twins differ in belief – a violation of psychophysical supervenience.

Though linguistic externalism has few serious opponents, many are repelled by the corresponding externalist conception of mental content. The contemporary literature contains a variety of arguments aimed explicitly at blocking the move from linguistic content to mental content. In this paper I examine one such argument, an important and influential argument by Robert Stalnaker, which first appeared in his paper ‘Indexical Belief’, and subsequently figured in his book, Inquiry. My primary goal is to focus attention on an implicit epistemological premise, on a conception of the rational subject as having the capacity to detect sameness and difference in psychological content independently of any knowledge of the external world. This Cartesian picture of introspective access is by no means unique to Stalnaker; it is presupposed in a wide variety of contexts – psychological, semantical, metaphysical, and epistemological – and, I argue, it motivates much of the opposition to externalist models of the mental. There are, of course, other sources of opposition to externalist models of content, but this Cartesian epistemology infects much of contemporary theory; indeed, in many respects this epistemology is more interesting and more pervasive than the metaphysical doctrine of supervenience and, yet, it has never been seriously investigated. In Section 1, I explore the role of this epistemological thesis and its links to internalism. In Section 2, I argue that this epistemology and the internalism it supports should be abandoned. In Section 3, I discuss an alternative, weaker construal of Stalnaker’s argument, one, however, that provides no support for internalism.

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In ‘Indexical Belief’, Stalnaker addressed a number of problems that plague our understanding of indexicals as they occur in belief ascrip-